

# New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1954

Volume XV, Number 9

Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Week of September 27, 1954

## 1954 PRODUCTIONS Premieres in Other Years Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

| Stage Play                                  | Page |
|---------------------------------------------|------|
| *Can-Can .....                              | 304  |
| Charley's Aunt .....                        | 179  |
| Dead Pigeon .....                           | 176  |
| End as a Man .....                          | 250  |
| *Fifth Season (The) .....                   | 380  |
| In the Summer House .....                   | 168  |
| John Murray Anderson's Almanac .....        | 191  |
| Kind Sir .....                              | 225  |
| *Kismet .....                               | 198  |
| Late Love .....                             | 258  |
| Madam, Will You Walk .....                  | 201  |
| Me and Juliet .....                         | 298  |
| My 3 Angels .....                           | 334  |
| *Oh, Men! Oh, Women! .....                  | 184  |
| Picnic .....                                | 348  |
| Prescott Proposals (The) .....              | 187  |
| Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker<br>(The) .....   | 165  |
| Sabrina Fair .....                          | 217  |
| Sing Till Tomorrow .....                    | 172  |
| *Solid Gold Cadillac (The) .....            | 222  |
| *Tea and Sympathy .....                     | 266  |
| *Teahouse of the August Moon<br>(The) ..... | 254  |
| Wonderful Town .....                        | 344  |
| 1952 Vol.                                   |      |
| Dial M for Murder .....                     | 215  |
| *Seven Year Itch (The) .....                | 186  |
| 1951 Vol.                                   |      |
| King and I (The) .....                      | 304  |
| 1949 Vol.                                   |      |
| South Pacific .....                         | 312  |

\*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of September 27, 1954

## 1954 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1954

Reviews Appear in This Volume

| Stage Play                             | Page | Stage Play                         | Page |
|----------------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|------|
| *All Summer Long .....                 | 304  | *Home Is the Hero .....            | 307  |
| *Anniversary Waltz .....               | 339  | Immortalist (The) .....            | 373  |
| Burning Glass (The) .....              | 357  | *King of Hearts .....              | 342  |
| *By the Beautiful Sea .....            | 335  | Lullaby .....                      | 377  |
| *Caine Mutiny Court Martial, The ..... | 382  | Mademoiselle Colombe .....         | 397  |
| Confidential Clerk (The) .....         | 370  | Magic and the Loss (The) .....     | 332  |
| Coriolanus .....                       | 385  | *Midsummer Night's Dream (A) ..... | 311  |
| *Dear Charles .....                    | 316  | Ondine .....                       | 362  |
| Girl in Pink Tights (The) .....        | 354  | *Pajama Game (The) .....           | 324  |
| Girl on the Via Flaminia (The) .....   | 349  | Sea Gull (The) .....               | 327  |
| Golden Apple (The) .....               | 346  | Starcross Story (The) .....        | 390  |
| *Hayride .....                         | 319  | Winner (The) .....                 | 365  |
| His and Hers .....                     | 393  |                                    |      |

CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD ..... 330

### Theatre Openings

"All Summer Long" "Home Is the Hero"  
"A Midsummer Night's Dream"

\*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of September 27, 1954

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN  
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS  
NEW YORK POST

NEW YORK MIRROR

NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN  
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE  
NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.  
Yearly Subscription \$25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

# "All Summer Long"

The New York Times

September 24, 1954

## Theatre: Coming of Age

By BROOKS ATKINSON

TAKEN on its own terms as character study, "All Summer Long" is a poignant and beautiful play. It is the work of Robert Anderson whose "Tea and Sympathy" was the first piece of art last season. Adapted from a novel by Donald Wetzel, it opened at the Coronet last evening—the first piece of art this year.

Mr. Anderson believes in writing for actors. Some excellent actors under the sensitive direction of Alan Schneider, are taking advantage of a rare opportunity by putting on the finest performance of the new season. They are playing the parts of an irascible middle Western family that seems to represent the commonest denominator in American life. They are a sorry lot on the whole.

Since the characterizations are penetrating, the acting is superb. John Kerr as a youth with a good mind and a condescending attitude; Ed Begley as a crude, choleric father; June Walker as a warm-hearted mother with a sweet manner; young Clay Hall as an adole-

cent boy trying to find his place in an angry world—these actors have the principal parts and play them with great insight and feeling.

But the secondary parts are also played with something approaching perfection. They must be said, too. For Carroll Baker's portrait of a young married woman riddled with ideas of cheap beauty; John Randolph's characterization of a good-hearted but obtuse mechanic, and little Daniela Boni's spontaneous sketch of a happy girl next door—are also integral pieces of the whole work of art.

Inside a lovely though withered sketch of an old house by Jo Mielziner, Mr. Schneider has staged a soft, pulsing performance that speaks the truth consistently all evening. It is good to be reminded so quietly that the people of the theatre can do such shining work.

Mr. Anderson's terms for this play are slighter than those for "Tea and Sympathy," and also involved. He is telling the story

of a family that is so preoccupied with its individual follies and comforts that it lets the old family house succumb to the erosion of a river. Willie, the boy, and Don, his older brother, know that the river is creeping in toward the foundations. Since no one else in the family is willing to face ugly realities, they laboriously build a loose retaining wall.

The father is too chuckle-headed to face the facts. He is counting on help from the state some time in the rosy future. The mother is incorrigibly sentimental. The daughter has a fixation about her personal beauty and thinks of nothing but herself. And her husband does nothing but tinker with his car. The rains come and wash away the feeble wall the two boys have built, and the house begins to disintegrate. The family flees as impulsively as it has ignored realities all summer long.

There is doubtless some symbolism in this story somewhere. But Mr. Anderson's method of saying nothing in his own right as author leaves the symbolism vague and vapory. "All Summer Long" leaves a theatregoer wondering whether it is trying to say too much or too little. There is something unresolved in the theme. There is no character, like the headmaster's merciful wife in "Tea and Sympathy," who is in command of the whole situation. And since the central theme is

### "ALL SUMMER LONG"

Play by Robert Anderson, adapted from a novel by Donald Wetzel; staged by Alan Schneider; setting and lighting by Jo Mielziner; presented by the Playwrights' Company at the Coronet Theatre, September 23, 1954. The cast: Willie.....Clay Hall  
Don.....John Kerr  
Mother.....June Walker  
Dad.....Ed Begley  
Ruth.....Carroll Baker  
Harry.....John Randolph  
Theresa.....Daniela Boni

nebulous, the progress of the drama seems desultory and sometimes aimless and general.

As a series of characterizations that are interwoven and act on each other, "All Summer Long" is a remarkable piece of work. For this is a family in which the heart is dead. Except for the devotion of the two brother's love has gone out of everyone's life, and everybody feels irritable and isolated.

Mr. Anderson pins his characters on the screen of his play with pitiless accuracy. His actors portray them with skill and understanding. There is something lacking in the whole scope of "All Summer Long." But the quality is admirable.

DAILY NEWS

September 24, 1954

## 'All Summer Long' an Impeccably Staged Drama About a Little Boy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The same Robert Anderson who gave us a fine play called "Tea and Sympathy" has given us another one of the same calibre, "All Summer Long." Last evening at the Coronet Theatre the Playwrights' Company, of which Anderson is a fledgling member, gave this wistful drama an impeccable production. There are seven excellent performances by a company of seven actors, two of whom are most particularly gifted; and these seven actors have been blessed by the sensitiveness and intelligence of their director, Alan Schneider.

"All Summer Long" is not a happy play; the satisfaction it gives must come from the stirring-up of an emotion which lies deeper than pleasure—the emotion called sympathy, about which playwright Anderson must now be considered an expert. He also must now be considered an expert on frustration—which reminds me that I hope to encounter an unfrustrated charac-

ter before this new stage season is over.

### A Boy Becomes a Man

This new play, which has been adapted from a novel by Donald Wetzel, is a little story about a little boy of 12 who has the guts to go through with one single job all summer long when he should be out frolicking with the precocious little Italian girl from next door. His one job is to save his home—and the pity of it is that it isn't a home worth saving. In this long summer he becomes a man, and a man of courage.

This boy lives in a small mid-western town, in a house by a big winding river. Unnoticed by anybody else, the river has been cutting in closer to the house, sneak-

ing under the banks. The boy, aided somewhat physically and more than somewhat spiritually by a crippled elder brother, undertakes to build a stone retaining wall beneath the bank to deflect the stream and save the house from toppling in.

Why this boy should do this he does not know, for there isn't any love or happiness in the house. His father is a loud-voiced, scolding bully. His mother is sweet and cowed by her husband. His sister is a beautiful nitwit who is married to a lunkheaded mechanic. His big brother, once a high school athlete but now crippled from an accident, is the only one the boy can look to for strength of soul—and even the big brother is embittered.

### Concise and Penetrating

That is about all there is to the story. In the end the river sweeps away the little boy's little wall and the house, too, but it is not a defeat

for him. At the beginning of manhood he has found himself.

In nine short scenes the story is told, concisely and penetratingly. The performances are about all one could ask. John Kerr, who was so fine in "Bernardine" and "Tea and Sympathy," is even finer in "All Summer Long" as the elder brother. He is a remarkably sensitive and intelligent young actor. Clay Hall, as the 12-year-old, handles a most difficult role with uncanny instinct for being right. He and Kerr shared many cheers from the audience after the play was over, last evening.

Kerr's own mother, June Walker, plays the mother most appealingly. Ed Begley blusters and snarls effectively as the father. An extraordinarily handsome lass, Carroll Baker, turns in a sharply limned performance as the married sister who wants only to read movie magazines and be beautiful and is shocked and revolted when she discovers she has become pregnant. John Randolph is helpful in the role of the easygoing mechanic, and another child actor, Daniela Boni, turns in a pert and zestful impersonation of the little girl from next door.

The setting is another of Jo Mielziner's skeleton jobs, allowing us to look outdoors or indoors according to where our interest lies at the moment. Like all Mielziner sets, it is an intelligent part of the play. And it is an intelligent play.

# New York Post

September 24, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

## The New Play by Robert Anderson

Donald Wetzel's rather neglected novel, "A Wreath and a Curse," was a sort of poor white "Fall of the House of Usher," which effectively symbolized the disintegration of a futile and unhappy family group in the physical collapse of their decaying home into the raging waters of a nearby river. As adapted into a play by Robert Anderson called "All Summer Long," with which the Playwrights' Company opened its season at the Coronet Theater last night, it has moments of sensitive power but somehow fails to add up into a properly moving drama.

Since Mr. Anderson's previous play was "Tea and Sympathy," which is still both a critical and popular success on Broadway, his second work was naturally looked forward to with eagerness at a time when oncoming new American dramatists are the theater's most important

need. Although "All Summer Long" seems to me a disappointment, there is as yet no reason to suspect that its author may have been seriously overrated by his admirers. It still is evident that he can capture a brooding mood, understand character and write scenes that possess touching honesty.

In this case, the mood is perhaps American Chekhov in its preoccupation with boredom and decay, but it is by no means slavish in its paraphrase. As for its characters, Mr. Anderson is, as he was in "Tea and Sym-

pathy," more effective in dealing with his sensitive and sympathetic figures than he is with those who meet with his disapproval. In this case the blundering and intolerant father of the family. And he continues to be at his best when writing scenes that dramatize the wistful groping of young people confused in a world they never made.

There is so much that is good in several of these scenes that it strikes me as the greater pity that the play lacks the capacity for combining them into a pattern of rising dramatic power. Instead, my impression is that "All Summer Long" must stand on such individual episodes as the pathetic efforts of a crippled youth and an eager child to save their home from falling into the river and the terror of a shallow young wife at the thought of losing her beauty. The cumulative effect that the drama demands is simply not forthcoming.

This, it appears, is to be the local theater's open season on fathers. Just as the head of the family was the monster in "Home Is the Hero" Wednesday night, the bumbling and irritable parent is the unsympathetic fig-

ure in "All Summer Long." There is a case to be made for him, as there was for the one in the new Irish play, and there are times when Mr. Anderson seems on the verge of making it, but, on the whole, the father is regarded as more villain than human being. It is one of the flaws in a drama that is never as good as it always seems on the verge of becoming.

"All Summer Long" at least demonstrates one thing that hardly required more demonstration. It is that John Kerr, who plays the crippled son, is a young actor of exceptional ease, sensitivity and intelligence. His portrayal is a model of quiet and compassionate power. There are other good performances,

particularly by June Walker as the pious and futile mother, by Clay Hall as the unhappy child of the family, and by Ed Begley, who faces handicaps in the role of the father. John Randolph and Carroll Baker are also helpful, and so is Jo Mielziner's setting. But Mr. Anderson's play doesn't quite manage to get started.

# Herald Tribune

September 24, 1954

## THEATER

### 'All Summer Long'

By WALTER F. KERR

FOR Robert Anderson's new play at the Coronet, Jo Mielziner has designed a shaggy, tree-draped riverbank, hung low with spindly branches and silver leaves. At one side of the stage rises a light and rambling skeleton house. The picture is warmly promising.

But Mr. Anderson has also written, I think, a skeleton play. He is concerned with a single summer, an "important" one in the life of an eleven-year-old boy. The boy is discovering things about himself (he wasn't wanted), about his family (no one of them faces reality), about the facts of life (his pet dog is giving birth, the girl next door is boisterously interested in sex-play). He is also cruelly aware that the house they live in is being undermined by an encroaching river and he is anxious to build a retaining-wall against the storms that are bound to come.

The moods of the play are rueful, violent, ironic. But they

are terribly studied moods, worked out with a fearful deliberation. They come in carefully marked-off little sequences, each with a label attached. Mr. Anderson's characters seem to be saying "This is going to be a scene of sultry indolence," "This is a scene of sensitive communion," "This is an episode that will chill your blood."

Having made his too-plain announcement, the author goes on to execute the scene as though it were an assignment in homework. The family sits in silence on the steps for a long, futile time. A crippled older brother roughs up the eleven-year-old in playful affection. A pregnant daughter hurls herself suddenly against an electrified fence, hoping to bring on an abortion.

As the characters make these calculated motions, they are extraordinarily conscious of themselves and their roles in the play. Each has analyzed himself in some detail: the angry daughter

knows that she is not bright, merely beautiful; the father knows that he is feeble with his sons; the coltish youngster knows that he is passing through a crisis; the cripple is quick to say that "a part of me is dead." They seem to speak with the detached wisdom of the author who has created them, and when they are finished outlining their own lives they are quick to explain each other's. ("You've become so critical—so bitter.") For all their acumen, however, they are unable to establish communication, and as the play goes on they take to declining their confusion grammatically: "I don't understand," "You don't understand," and "He doesn't understand" become the recurring plaints of the play.

The evening is made, then, of statements, rather than of unconscious flesh and blood.

The facade is very nearly perfect. In addition to the beautifully lighted Mielziner setting, there is evocative incidental music by Albert Hague. Alan Schneider has directed with vigor and an often vivid pictorial sense, erring only in stressing the patent sentiment and sometime self-pity that runs through the script.

Three or four of the performances are soberly engaging. Clay Hall, as the shock-haired and gangling yearling, beetles his brows and tenses his fists in

wonderfully stubborn, wonderfully bewildered, despair. When he is evading his belligerent father without quite knowing why, or when he is taking a matter-of-fact view of his sister's bout with the barbed-wire, he has the casual cruelty, and the confused sensitivity, of childhood itself. John Kerr, stumbling about on crutches and passionately demanding that his family square off with the truth, is equally satisfying. The role runs to rhetoric, and Mr. Kerr is often made to seem unbearably righteous; but this excellent young actor is maturing so rapidly that he is nearly able to override whatever is whining in the part out of his own urgent authority.

Ed Begley, as an ill-tempered father who has once kicked the house he lives in and who is desperately eager to see some chickens electrocuted, is effective in both his venom and his fumbling pathos. John Randolph's obtuse mechanic, June Walker's wistful mother, Carroll Baker's bitter wife, and Daniela Boni's roustabout playmate are all intermittently helpful.

But the pleasures of "All Summer Long" can only be intermittent. Mr. Anderson keeps turning the current on and off with too deliberate and detached a hand.

# Languid Drama

## Gentle Mood Pieces Fail to Stimulate

By JOHN McCLAIN

IT IS CERTAINLY no fault of Robert Anderson, author of "All Summer Long" which opened at the Coronet Theatre last night, that several of his characters bore striking resemblances to those in "Home Is the Hero," the Walter Macken play which opened the night before. It is his fault, however, that his people failed to go anywhere in particular.

For it seemed to me that the bright young author of "Tea And Sympathy," allowed himself to settle for a series of gentle mood pieces, many of them charming, but which in aggregate added up to less than a stimulating evening.

A middle-class family lives in an old house on a river bank in a small mid-Western town. The river is rising, year

by year, but the only member of the family to become perturbed or do anything about it is little Willie, the eleven-year-old son.

While everybody else bickers and nags over selfish trivialities, he and his older brother, a cripple, work all Summer long to build a retaining wall. It's a noble effort but Ol' Man River rolls along in the end and takes the house with it.

### Dull Characters

I have no quarrel with this ending, but along the way I lost interest to the point that I almost hoped some of the characters would have been trapped in the house when the river rose.

The daughter, for instance, while excessively beautiful is so dreadfully self-centered that one wonders how the author could have put up with her while he wrote the show. The father seems similarly lacking in all charm—he is crochety, sullen, and then carried away by moments of childish exuberance. The mother is a bore; the brother-in-law is a dope. There simply aren't enough people in the cast that excite any particular interest.

The two that come closest are the little boy and his brother. The kid is experiencing the stirrings of adolescence and the older lad, an athlete

who has been crippled in an automobile accident, is the only member of the family who understands and gives him guidance.

The relationship between the two and their losing battle with the ignorance of the rest of the brood is the only element of strength in the evening. But it is unfortunately too languid and mild most of the time to triumph over the dismal complexities of the other characters.

John Kerr gives one of his noble and sensitive performances as the crippled brother, and Clay Hall is of course superb as Willie. Ed Begley wrestles gamely with the role of father, a thankless battle at best, and, June Walker makes a skilful try as the smiling and vapid mother.

John Randolph, has one good scene as the brother-in-law, and Carrol Baker, who plays his wife is certainly as pretty a newcomer as we're apt to see this season. Daniela Boni, another new brat, steals a couple of scenes as Willie's girl friend.

But "All Summer Long" is a disappointing successor to "Tea And Sympathy," much of Mr. Anderson's careful writing is there, but in this instance it's much too careful.



New York World-Telegram and The Sun

September 24, 1954

## 'All Summer Long' Is Exactly Right

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It is a fine event in one's life to see a rare play like "All Summer Long," which opened at the Coronet last night. It is composed with taste and insight, has much of importance to say, and is performed in a manner which could simply not be improved upon.

This is a love story, first and foremost, about seven people in a family group. It is not often

concerned with passion, but usually with ties bred by consanguinity and familiarity. It tells a lot about the inarticulateness of domestic devotion and the terrible failures

of some people to win or deserve the love they want.

In a less personal way, "All Summer Long" is also a major warning against indifference. This family lives complacently on a river bend which is slowly being undermined. Each of them is too absorbed in some selfish aim to take action.

### Labor Lost.

Only the 11-year-old boy, whose difficult, growing up

summer it is, makes a move. He exhausts himself bringing rocks by raft to build a retaining wall. Helped by his crippled older brother, he manages a pile which is finally washed away.

As the family has to run for its life, we find that at least his positive effort has helped his older brother to mature, and their future is assured.

The bulkier role falls on young John Kerr, whose quiet, decisive skill has already made him one of the theater's most important actors. He plays the moody, crippled athlete with outward languor and stern inner luminousness which is exciting and powerful.

As the younger boy, Clay Hall has the unconscious balance between spontaneity and technical precision that older actors work a lifetime to acquire. There is not a false moment in what he does. And the youngster has natural charm. There are moments when these two boys' quiet smile of affection for each other would melt a Gorgon.

June Walker, who is Kerr's real mother, plays the mother here with a delicacy and courage that is spellbinding. This is a superficial, passive character, the "good" woman who is supposed to be uninteresting.

The father is acted with superb judgment by Ed Begley. This is not a wicked man, but a petty, insensitive, parsimonious one.

Carroll Baker is the beautiful sister who senses her own stupidity. Pregnancy sends her into such panic, with its threat of losing her beauty, that she cruelly blames at the little boy who is becoming gently aware of sex.

### Exactly Right.

John Randolph is exactly right as her mechanic husband, set upon buying a car. And young Daniela Boni is joyously precocious as the child of a loose, gay, dirty, happy family next door.

The play has a basic affinity to "Death of a Salesman." It lacks that drama's violence, but it is sweeter and has things to say in a more universal way.

# Daily Mirror

September 24, 1954

## 'All Summer Long' Offers Stimulating Drama

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Though "All Summer Long" may not earn as much as "Tea and Sympathy"—they are both by Robert Anderson—we think the former a more honest, moving and rewarding play. The new arrival at the Coronet Theatre was adapted from a novel by Donald Wetzel. Perhaps, of necessity, it is an episodic work.

THERE ARE NINE scenes in its two acts. But, thanks to adaptor Anderson's skilled craftsmanship and a simple and evocative setting by Jo Mielziner, it is remarkably cohesive and fluid. Frankly, we were so absorbed by its character studies that we hardly noticed the curtain's rise and falls.

In "All Summer Long," Anderson comes to grips with the things that make the average person tick. He is a dramatist of insight and compassion. He

has admiration for the idealist and sympathy for the misbegotten. And, best of all, he has a keen understanding of people.

The Munsons are an ordinary and not a very happy family. Dad is stubborn and obtuse. He doesn't mean to be a heel, but he just doesn't know how to be a regular guy. Mom is sweet and fumbling. The older son, a former college basketball player, tries not to be bitter because of an automobile accident that crippled him.

HE DEVOTES HIMSELF to making a man of his young brother. When other members of the family are harsh to the sensitive kid, big brother Don is there with helpful advice and encouragement. The sister, who married an aggressive mechanic to escape from her drab home, fears to have a child because it might spoil her figure. Not having intelligence, she seeks to compensate for it by capitalizing on her looks.

When floods threaten to wash away the family house, Dad Munson spends his time writing letters to politicians in the hope they'll build him a retaining wall. But his more practical and self-reliant sons labor all Summer long to build a defense of small stones. Though the river eventually sweeps it away, they have the satisfaction of having made a good fight to avoid disaster.

John Kerr, whom we voted the most promising actor of the season a few semesters back, justifies that Variety ballot with a deeply stirring performance as the older brother. Though it is beautifully restrained, it is notable for highly effective implications.

CLAY HALL makes an auspicious Broadway debut as the younger brother. He contributes a characterization that churns the emotions with its tenderness and truth. June Walker, young Kerr's mother and one of our distinguished actresses, is fine as the well-meaning and optimistic Mrs. Munson.

Ed Begley is eminently right as the blustering head of the house who can't find the right words to convey his innate decency. Salutes are also due John Randolph, Carroll Baker and Daniels Bond.

Alan Schneider, who originally staged the play during a tryout in Washington, has mounted the Playwrights' Company production with a sure and capable hand.

"All Summer Long" is not a play for escapists. It is not a pleasant play. But if you seek integrity and thoughtfulness in the theatre, we recommend that you visit the Coronet. It is a stimulating drama, a drama of feeling and impact, modest in scope, for those who would consider the eternal verities for a couple of hours.

## "Home Is the Hero"

### New York Post

September 23, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

## The Irish Drama in a Glum Mood

The prestige of the contemporary Irish theater is hardly likely to be enhanced in America by "Home Is the Hero," which opened last night at the Booth. This sullen and ill-resolved new drama by Walter Macken, who also enacts one of its leading roles, was regarded by customarily trustworthy Dublin critics as the best play to have come out of Ireland in recent years, but it seemed to me, despite some scenes of angry effectiveness and several skillful performances, gravely disappointing in its efforts to achieve a mood of ironic tragedy.

It may be only because of its Irish origin and background, but I couldn't escape the impression that, in writing "Home Is the Hero," Mr. Macken was endeavoring to provide a kind of free tragic paraphrase of that masterpiece of comedy, "The Playboy of the Western World." At least, he seemed bent on contemplating the difference between a community's romantic idealization of a man who has committed a murder and the ugly reality. I hasten to add that

the similarity is merely in theme, and not in skill, effectiveness or sardonic power.

Anyway, the central figure is a man who is just about to return to his home town after spending five years in prison for killing a friend in a drunken frenzy. Although his family, which knows him, has its doubts about the brawling fellow, he is regarded with considerable friendliness by many of his neighbors, and they are even planning a celebration in his honor. When, however, he sneaks in by the back door and curses the friends who had gathered in front of the house to sing his praises, his children and wife are more saddened than surprised.

There are, I am afraid, many failures in the play, but the major one seems to me in the character of the returned father, whom Mr. Macken also portrays. My first impression was that the author intended to show him as a tormented and confused man who really wanted to be tender to his family and reasonable with his neighbors, but was the victim of an inner-demon that turned his well-meant emotions into fury and bitterness. Instead, however, his actions reveal him as just a savage family tyrant and a scoundrel of rather melodramatic proportions.

But the weakness of "Home Is the Hero" doesn't reside entirely in the badly resolved central character. Despite Mr. Macken's ability to write occasional effective scenes, particularly those in which the crippled son is standing up to his tyrannical father, his semi-tragedy never rises to the bitterly ironic climax or achieves the quality of sardonic, brooding pity that he seems to have intended. Lacking the lyric exuberance characteristic of the finest Irish plays, it also fails to atone for it by any realistic dramatic force.

Whatever his defects are as a playwright, Mr. Macken is an excellent actor, and his performance supplies at least some of the father's inner-torment that

### "HOME IS THE HERO"

Play by Walter Macken; staged by Worthington Miner; production designed by Marvin Reiss; presented by the Theatre Guild and Mr. Miner at the Booth Theatre, September 22, 1954. The cast: Willie O'Reilly... Donald Harron Daylia... Glenda Farrell Bid... Ann Thomas Dovetail... J. Pat O'Malley Josie... Peggy Ann Garner Lily Green... Loretta Leverage Trapper... Art Smith Paddy O'Reilly... Walter Macken Mrs. Green... Frances Fuller Manchester Monaghan... Christopher Plummer

fails to emerge in the writing. There is honest forcefulness in Donald Harron's playing of the son, and Loretta Leverage brings a lovely, moving freshness to the role of the murdered man's understanding daughter. Among the others, Glenda Farrell as the bull's frightened wife, Peggy Ann Garner as his embittered daughter and J. Pat O'Malley as a would-be friend provide help. But "Home Is the Hero" reveals the Irish drama in an ineffectual mood.

## "Home Is the Hero"—continued

Journal  American

September 23, 1954

# Macken Stars In Own Play

## Fine Cast in Good Modern Irish Character Study

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE is never a dull moment in the O'Reilly home, a modern edifice under consideration by Walter Macken in his new play, "Home Is the Hero," which the Theatre Guild presented at the Booth last night.

Mr. O'Reilly, played by the author, has just served five years for manslaughter; his son Willie, partially crippled, is struggling against the love of the daughter of the man his father killed; the sister, Josie, is in love with a reprehensible City Slicker; two boarders, acquired to defray expenses during Pop's incarceration, are luring Mums

into the local pub, and things are generally violent all over.

But things are also very good in this modern Irish character study: Mr. Macken has written an incisive and often humorous consideration of believable people, and he and his colleagues perform it wonderfully well.

### Guilt Complex

He has quite obviously a profound understanding of the complicated psychoses of his native breed: the tragic insecurity, the wild temper, the relentless romanticism, and it is from these ingredients that he has fashioned his story.

His hero has killed a man in a fight which was provoked by his own sense of inferiority and he returns to his family, after five years in jail, determined to put his house in order.

His guilt complex leads him to quarrel with the widow of the man he killed, he denounces his daughter for her genuine and harmless romance with the local smoothie, he accuses his wife of tipling when she was actually praying in the village chapel and he finally knocks the male boarder down stairs, almost duplicating his former crime.

This is all very Irish yet, to me, plausible. You have a sincere and tormenting realization of what is going on in this man's mind, and an equally sympathetic knowledge of his family's plight. There is not a dreary sequence in the evening and in my

compendium it is as good Gaelic-type drama as will be seen hereabouts until Mr. O'Casey lifts his pen again.

### Excellent Cast

There must be a true wish-fulfillment in playing the lead in your own show, and Mr. Macken realizes it to the hilt. He succeeds in being bullying, brash, stubborn, weak and unbelievably engaging.

Surrounding him is an exceptional cast headed by Peggy Ann Garner, as the daughter; Glenda Farrell, as the wife; J. Pat O'Malley, as the boarder; Donald Harron, Lovetta Liverssee, Art Smith, Frances Fuller, Ann Thomas and Christopher Plummer in the contiguous roles.

Worthington Miner, who has played hookey from the theatre lately, came back to direct and co-produce this one and I thought he made a noble contribution. A nod should also be given Marvin Reiss for the single set of the downstairs room in "a long avenue of houses in a town in Ireland."

The new season is barely under way and, faith and be-jabbers, here is another hit.

DAILY  NEWS

September 23, 1954

# 'Home Is the Hero' a Relentlessly Grim, Well-Played Irish Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

From Dublin's Abbey Theatre the Theatre Guild has brought Walter Macken and his play, "Home Is the Hero," and has lodged them in the Booth Theatre. They are—the

author-actor and the drama—relentlessly grim as they explore the home life of an Irishman who has just finished doing five years for killing one of his best friends in a small fit of pique.

Much of "Home Is the Hero" is impressive—the acting by an excellent company directed by Worthington Miner, the strength and clarity of the writing in several scenes and the uncompromisingly realistic attitude of the drama itself. The first-night audience gave it absorbed and respectful attention, and it might be that I should now be cheering for it as a work of art. But I can't quite come up to cheering. I appreciate many fine qualities in the writing and the

acting, but I find myself unable to summon complete enthusiasm. My trouble was, at last evening's first performance, that I developed a growing disinterest in what might happen to the hero.

### Still Is a Bully

Macken, a big, sour-visaged man, comes home after his five-year stretch for a killing in a drunken brawl. He seems to be ashamed of himself for the sorrows he has wrought and hopeful that he will be taken back by his family and his community. The family and the community—even

the widow of the man he killed—are willing to take him back and forget what happened five years ago; but he won't let them.

As his son describes him, this fellow "didn't want anyone to have a lamp unless he lit it himself." He was a bully and he still is a bully, being insecure in his mind but powerfully secure in his physical strength. He won't let his crippled son—who has kept the home together by working at the cobbler's trade—marry the daughter of the man he killed. He feels so guilty that a union such as this would be unthinkable, even though the young people love each other. He won't let his spunky young daughter marry an upstanding and prosperous race-track follower. He won't permit a frowzy pair of roomers to spend another night in his house, even though the rent they have paid these five years has helped preserve the house.

### No Solution.

All this is tersely, vividly told, and a few spots of humor occasionally lighten the general grimness. But last evening I could find no solution; no resolution, in the drama; when the three acts are just about over the homecoming hero simply picks up his kit-bag and walks away, leaving everybody just where they were. Macken, both as author and actor, must have conceived this drama as the tragedy of a man who cannot fit himself into society. It would be an excellent, moving tragedy if one were really interested in this man. But I wasn't.

Macken has something more than physical stature in the central role. Glenda Farrell is splendid as his mousy wife. Peggy Ann Garner has a couple of lively scenes as the rebellious daughter, and Donald Harron has a couple of his own as the crippled son. Ann Thomas and J. Pat O'Malley provide some rowdy interludes of comedy as the roomers, and Frances Fuller has a touching scene as the relict of the murdered man. Christopher Plummer is a great help in the role of the young gambler, and Art Smith appears now and then as an old Irish codger.

The Theatre Guild may have found another Eugene O'Neill in Walter Macken—but I don't believe Macken has found himself yet.

## Daily Mirror

September 23, 1954

### 'Home Is the Hero,' Irish Drama, Fails to Please

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The Theatre Guild and Worthington Miner brought Walter Macken's Abbey Theatre hit, "Home Is the Hero," to the Booth Wednesday evening. We doubt that this Irish comedy-drama will duplicate its Dublin success over here, for its leading character is a heel, a bully and something of a bore.

PADDY O'REILLY couldn't stand being bested at anything, checkers, jumping, drinking or fighting. In a pub brawl, he accidentally killed a smaller but smarter man at adding figures. After a five-year jail term, he comes home a bit of a hero, re-

membered by his neighbors and family as an ingratiating braggart.

The welcoming committee is amazed to discover that Paddo is still a minor dictator, but now bereft of charm and humor. What extenuating graces he had once possessed have

vanished. He is a dour, mean, arrogant man, determined to make his wife and children atone for his mistake.

Eventually, the O'Reilly family rebels. They refuse to knuckle under any longer to the tyrant. Exposed for what he really is, Paddo takes to the road, to the relief of his miserable brood and at least one unhappy first-nighter.

THE GUILD and Miner have given "Home Is the Hero" a top-flight cast. Author Macken is so successful as Paddo that he relentlessly reveals him for the empty and wretched egomaniac he is. You may not like Paddo, as Macken plays him, but you won't easily forget him and you'll be glad to escape from him.

J. Pat O'Malley, one of our favorite character actors, is amusing as a raffish boarder and Ann Thomas ably complements that performance as his blousy and gussy wife, Glenda Farrell, Peggy Ann Garner and

Donald Harron are excellent as Paddo's long-suffering family.

Loretta Leversee, Christopher Plummer, Frances Fuller and Art Smith are first-rate as other victims of the O'Reilly's cruelty. We particularly liked Plummer, as the town's natty, resourceful, smart-money boy. Were we a movie scout, Plummer would be receiving a Hollywood contract right away.

MINER, too long absent from the theatre, has staged the Macken work with skill, while Marvin Reiss has designed a serviceable setting.

"Home Is the Hero" has its merits, but it is an unpleasant and repetitious play. We have been enormously excited by other unpleasant plays. We do not demand sweetness and light. But we prefer drabness to be more illuminating and rewarding. Paddo's brutal pranks just don't add up to a satisfying evening of theatre for us.

## NEW YORK Herald Tribune

September 23, 1954

### THEATER

### 'Home Is the Hero'

By WALTER F. KERR

#### Prodigal Father

IN "Home Is the Hero" the new play at the Booth, author Walter Macken plays his own disturbing hero, a great strong ox of an Irishman with a gift of merriment and a talent for injuring the people he loves. In the course of giving his infant son an exuberant toss into the air, he has lamed him for life. In the course of making sure that he is the champion checker-player, the champion drinker, and the champion sport of the town, he has killed one of his closest friends.

When we first meet this hearty monarch, he is returning to his row-house home after five years in prison. He is no longer hearty. Grim, penitent, determined to make amends to his family, he settles down to an edgy evening meal. It isn't long before he discovers that the family has changed a bit in his absence; his slavy wife likes an encouraging nip now and then; his sullen daughter is dating the

town's shadiest 'fixer'; his crippled son is about to marry the daughter of the man he has killed.

Conscious that he is responsible for the turn things have taken, he sets out—with the best will in the world—to restore some sense of honor and dignity to these altered innocents. But he himself has not changed. For all his new-found sobriety, he is still a dictatorial bully. The only way he can think of reviving the family honor is by beating it into each member separately, with his belt-buckle if necessary.

Thereafter we watch him hurl his daughter to the floor, tussle with his son for a knife, and take a splintering chair to one of his oldest friends. At his most conscience-stricken, he is at his most pigheaded—and the folk around him can do nothing but rebel. As his son explains, he was always a dictator. But "now that the laugh of him is smothered in quiet, it's not possible to bear."

ered in quiet, it's not possible to bear."

The root materials of the play are, I think, exceptionally interesting. As his own playwright, Mr. Macken has a vivid interest in character complexity. His people can be quarrelsome and attractive, weak and endearing, arrogant and likable, in one breath. He has, furthermore, an Irish tongue that scatters homely but colorful images liberally about the stage. As actor—with a tight mouth and cavernous eyes—he has all the roaring authority needed to make Paddo O'Reilly, a convincing tyrant.

And he has been especially fortunate in some of his supporting players. Donald Harron, an excellent young actor just down from the Canadian Festival at Stratford, gives a brilliantly varied performance as the crippled son: sheepish as a girl unexpectedly proposes to him, morosely funny as he plans to be married in his only suit, vigorously righteous as he lashes out at the patriarch who would destroy his life all over again. Christopher Plummer does another skillful job of balancing contrasts, slowly turning his cocky no-good in a pin-striped suit into an honest and tough-minded Galahad. Peggy Ann Garner, Glenda Farrell—with gray, wispy hair and a shawl about her shoulders—Loretta

Leversee, and J. Pat O'Malley are all helpful.

But if belief in this promising parable slowly cracks before your eyes, it is probably for two reasons. One of them—the less important—is that the willing players never do quite settle into the Irish shawls they wear. "We've been rolled in a dog's dung" just doesn't come easily, as common speech, from Peggy Ann Garner. Even Glenda Farrell cannot get out "Oh, that's remarkable beautiful" without reminding you that the diction is alien. And sometimes emotions are as obviously assumed as the brogues: a boy sits with his fist stuffed into his mouth, a girl's hands go to her face, a man slaps his hand against the wall—and the gestures are only stage gestures, carefully worked out.

A more serious matter is author Macken's determination to be disliked. His Paddo is not a man of special stature; we have never seen him in his merrier days. We know him only as he nags, snarls, whines, and commands—with the result that in time, our patience wears exactly as thin as the family's.

There is insight, and an unmistakable theatrical vigor, in much of what Mr. Macken has done. But the strident tones of the bully strike a single note, and an irritable one.

# "Home Is the Hero"—continued

**The New York Times**

September 23, 1954

## Macken's 'Home Is the Hero' Opens at Booth

By **BROOKS ATKINSON**

**W**ALTER MACKEN'S "Home Is the Hero," which opened at the Booth last evening, represents three acts of conscientious writing and acting. In Dublin it may mean something that escapes us here. Most Americans are likely to leave the theatre wondering what Mr. Macken has in mind. For "Home Is the Hero" seems to be a self-contained and earnestly written play not worth the labor that has gone into it.

It opens on the day when Paddo O'Reilly comes home from jail where he has spent five years for killing a neighbor. Most of his old cronies are looking forward to his return, and Paddo is full of expectations, too. But nothing has remained static. Neither Paddo nor the others can pick up where they left off five years ago. After three acts of tension, quarreling and scuffling, Paddo takes off for the woods and fields.

In the great days of the Irish drama when writers and actors were stimulating each other and creating an art form, some of the plays had themes that were not much more substantial. They, too, portrayed life without trying to reach great conclusions. "Home Is the Hero" cannot be disqualified

from the tradition because it does not point a notable moral.

But it will have to be disqualified on literary grounds. With one or two exceptions the characters are uninteresting. The writing is pedestrian. There is no vitality under the surface bickering of the story. In comparison with the turbulent quarrels in the O'Casey plays, the tone of "Home Is the Hero" is pedantic. Mr. Macken goes through the familiar motions, but the fire is not there.

Under Worthington Miner's direction, a number of good actors labor as industriously as the author, with a result that is not much more exhilarating. J. Pat O'Malley puts a lot of exuberance into the part of a convivial rounder. Peggy Ann Garner gives an uncommonly skillful characterization of a confused and unhappy girl. As

a cheerful girl from the neighborhood, Loretta Leversee plays one love scene with particular charm.

Glenda Farrell, as the patient wife of a bully; Ann Thomas, as the contented wife of a boozier; Donald Harron, as a son with bitter memories; Art Smith, as a ruminative checker-player; Frances Fuller, as a forgiving neighbor; Christopher Plummer, as a minor racketeer—all give good performances that ought to count for something. Mr. Macken plays the part of the bully with skill and force.

But, like Marvin Reiss' setting of the interior of a lower class house, "Home Is the Hero" is cursed with competence. In the final analysis, it is a dull play about a disagreeable fellow.



New York World-Telegram

The ~~World~~ Sun

September 23, 1954

## 'Home Is the Hero' Pits Idol vs. Victims

By **WILLIAM HAWKINS**

The Theater Guild has an excellent property in "Home Is the Hero" at the Booth. The author, Mr. Walter Macken, plays the central character. As writer he is the production's greatest single benefactor. As actor he is sometimes its worst enemy.

The work is deeply Irish, raucous in comedy and critical and raw in emotion. Its title is ironic. It describes the devastating return of a man from five years in jail for his drunken killing of an innocent acquaintance by a blow of his fist.

His old friends are ready to greet him as a Hero. In the old days his strength and bravado had made him a popular dictator around the town. Now, guilt ridden, he still tries to boss

everyone in sight.

Times and people have changed. His wife tipsles. His daughter defies the town's criticism with brazen behavior. His son, crippled as a child by the father's carelessness, has become a man of character.

Pitting this shadowed idol against his own former victims, Macken has written an absorbing play. The conflict repeats in many hues, and so it all demands playing of great versatility.

Where the acting Macken lets down the writing Macken is in a monotonous performance. It is forever leashed. No honest burst of temper comes over the footlights. This is a Lear of a role, played in a just-you-wait

manner. Macken has composed like surf in a storm, and acts like a lake.

This is a pity, for the play, and for some absolutely first-rate performances in the other roles.

**Peggy Ann Convincing.**

Co-starred is Peggy Ann Garner, suddenly brunet, revealing the most astonishing new authority. She can be strident, touching and forceful, all with conviction. Every facet of the role is clear and the big emotional scenes are sound. Here is an actress as never before.

The most revealing performance in the play is Glenda Farrell as the Hero's timid wife. This flip dame of so many films is suddenly discovered as a sensitive character actress of rare delicacy. Little pauses become searchlights on personality, through her subtle timing. She accomplishes so much by doing so little that it is incredible Broadway uses her so seldom.

**Harron in Support.**

Donald Harron, the crippled son, is one of the best young actors on the continent, as anyone who has seen him act Shakespeare in Stratford, Ont., will agree. He creates a whole fabric of ideas and relationships in his performing, and readily supports the points of other actors.

J. Pat O'Malley and Ann Thomas are fine as comedy boarders playing sudden real emotions, as only real pros can.

Art Smith lends atmospheric quality as a rejected friend and Christopher Plummer is strong playing the sharper suitor of the Hero's daughter.

As the widow and daughter of the dead man it seems Frances Fuller and Loretta Leversee look city bred and sophisticated. This is a matter of casting which has nothing to do with their sincere acting, but disconnects them from the other characters.

Subscription Orders

Now Being Taken

1955

New York  
Theatre Critics'  
Reviews

YEARLY  
SUBSCRIPTION

\$25.00



# "A Midsummer Night's Dream"

**Daily Mirror**

September 22, 1954

## 'Midsummer Night,' At Met, Is a 'Must See'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The Old Vic Company's long-heralded revival of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" arrived at the Metropolitan Opera House Tuesday evening, under the managerial auspices of S. Hurok. It is a super spectacle, emphasizing the music by Felix Mendelssohn and choreography by Robert Helpmann.

IT IS SUCH a production as William Shakespeare most certainly never saw. We can imagine the shock his partners, the thrifty John Heminge and Cuthbert Burbage, would have had when confronted by the budget for such a sumptuous extravaganza. The bankroll for the Robin and Christopher Ironside costumes alone would have financed The Theatre and The Globe for many a season.

Director Michael Benthall devised this version of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" as a gala holiday attraction for the Old Vic Company. He has fashioned it in the spirit of an

English Christmas pantomime. It is huge, tasteful and eye-filling, with perhaps more appeal to the eye than the ear.

That is, when Hugo Rignold's excellent orchestra is not playing the charming Mendelssohn score. Frankly, in the wide expanses of the Met, we had difficulty in hearing some of Shakespeare's larkish and lovely poetry. This, we think, may have been due, in part, to the romplish and speedy pace set by director Benthall.

ROBERT HELPMANN, who first won fame as a ballet star, ironically was among the more

audible of the players. He not only danced with grace and authority, as Oberon, but made his lines come across the footlights with welcome clarity. Stanley Holloway was also outstanding as Bottom. He made this taxing role amusing, and his diction was admirable.

Moir Shearer was a gorgeous Titania. Never have we seen her dance with such charm and ease. Would that her speech had been as lucid as her toe work. For style, we were quite taken with Joan Benham, as Helena.

Despite its flaws, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" should go on your "must see" list. For its merits far outweigh its demerits.

So, we say bravo to the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells. They not only mount the classics with skill and splendor, but they turn a profit on them over here, too. We trust that our American managers will observe the long lines at the Met box-office—with thousands trying to buy seats for "A Midsummer Night's Dream"—and realize that there's gold to be mined from Shakespeare and the other greats.

### "A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM"

Play by William Shakespeare, with music by Felix Mendelssohn, arranged by Gordon Jacob, staged by Michael Benthall; scenery and costumes by Robin and Christopher Ironsides; choreography by Robert Helpmann; sponsored by Sol Hurok, by arrangement with the Old Vic Trust, Ltd., and the Arts Council of Great Britain at the Metropolitan Opera House, September 21, 1954. The cast:

|                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Theseus.....     | Anthony Nicholls   |
| Hippolyta.....   | Margaret Courtenay |
| Philstrate.....  | Peter Johnson      |
| Egeus.....       | John Dearth        |
| Hermia.....      | Ann Walford        |
| Demetrius.....   | Patrick Macnee     |
| Lysander.....    | Terence Longdon    |
| Helena.....      | Joan Benham        |
| Quince.....      | Eliot Makeham      |
| Bottom.....      | Stanley Holloway   |
| Flute.....       | Philip Locke       |
| Starveling.....  | Daniel Thorndike   |
| Snout.....       | Norman Rossington  |
| Snug.....        | Michael Redington  |
| Puck.....        | Philip Guard       |
| A Fairy.....     | Jocelyn Britton    |
| Oberon.....      | Robert Helpmann    |
| Titania.....     | Moir Shearer       |
| Cobweb.....      | Tania d'Avray      |
| Moth.....        | Shelia Wright      |
| Mustardseed..... | Joan King          |
| Indian Boy.....  | Rudolfo Cornejo    |

**DAILY NEWS**

September 22, 1954

## 'Midsummer Night's Dream' Big And Beautiful Spectacle at Met

By JOHN CHAPMAN

When Theseus, on the verge of a merger with his Amazonian queen, Hippolyta, first uttered the command, "Stir up the Athenian youth to merriment," he couldn't have realized

what he had ordered stirred up. A mere character in an original Shakespeare play, he must have been content to make do with the few trappings at hand at the moment. It was a long time before "A Midsummer Night's Dream" set fire to Felix Mendelssohn. And Mendelssohn was a long time before the Old Vic Company.

The original Theseus should have been at the Metropolitan Opera House last evening—if he could nudge his way through duchesses, divas, diplomats and dolls and find a seat—to see what happened when Shakespeare, Athenian revels, Mendelssohn, the Old Vic, many dainty

fugitives from the Sadler's Wells Ballet and impresario S. Hurok came together all at once.

This "Dream" is a vast and incredibly beautiful show. I don't imagine that it is art, for it is deliberately not all of a piece, being part play, part horseplay, part ballet and the rest "The Wedding March." I trail along with the generations which have gone before me in thinking that the "Dream" can be regarded as a work of art only when it is done as a straight play. But this stubborn conservatism did

not hinder my having an eye-popping and ear-filling fine time last evening.

The settings by Brunskill and Loveday and the costumes by Robin and Christopher Ironside are achievements of tasteful opulence. The music, as conducted by Hugo Rignold, is as deft and airy as young Mendelssohn could ever have hoped it would be. The dances, by the ballet company, are generally quite good, and a nocturne done as a pas-de-deux by Moira Shearer and Robert Helpmann is superb. Helpmann, in addition to acting and dancing the role of Oberon in the production's best performance, also has devised the choreography. In a fit of inspiration he has managed to make all his dancers move fast during the last-act Wedding March—a

great and welcome change of pace to one like myself, who has sat through a summer season of nuptials and watched an assorted dozen brides and grooms, plus their supporting ballet of bridesmaids and ushers, march down and up aisles as if they were walking barefoot on a long strip of flypaper.

Miss Shearer is a dreamy vision as Titania, and a superb dancer; as an actress she is not altogether audible—but this may be the fault of the management, which has installed loudspeakers in a theatre which I always considered almost perfect acoustically. Entirely audible, though, is Stanley Holloway in the role of Bottom. Here is a fine roughhouse comedian, and he and his playmates in the "Pyramus and Thisbe" scene engage in some marvelous slapstick.

There are many others in the big company whom I should mention, and I can't end this piece without a word of thanks to Joan Benham, who looks and acts like a beautiful Charlotte Greenwood, for her slyly comic playing of the lovestruck Helena, and to Philip Guard for his saucy and zesty acting-dancing of Puck.

These are revels indeed at the Old Met.

## "A Midsummer Night's Dream"—continued

The New York Times

September 22, 1954

### Theatre: The Old Vic

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AFTER appearing at the Edinburgh Festival during the summer the Old Vic has brought its "A Midsummer Night's Dream" to the Metropolitan Opera House, where it opened last evening. This is the coldest masque with the Mendelssohn music, sixty experienced musicians and Moira Shearer and Robert Helpmann in the leading roles. Michael Benthall, the Old Vic's current director, has shot the works. Nothing has been left out except a few transition passages from Shakespeare's verse.

Getting away from Theseus' palace in Athens as soon as possible, Robin and Christopher Irensjde, the designers have plunged vigorously into Shakespeare's enchanted wood

with foliage that reaches the sky, a moonlit crag and a crumbled scene in the center of the stage. In this leafy environment Mr. Helpmann has staged, and participates, in some sylvan ballets danced by lovely immortals to the immortal music of Mendelssohn.

Give the Old Vic credit for enterprise and industry. This is the biggest "A Midsummer Night's Dream" New York has seen since Max Reinhardt's. But these comments are written by one theatregoer who remains unconvinced. For this is also a heavy, slow-footed "Dream" which has little of the lightness of Shakespeare's verse, little of the lyrical beauty of his pastoral fancy and little of the daintiness of Mendelssohn's score. Even the comedy of Bottom and the

other mechanics is labored and heavy-handed.

After all, should Mendelssohn's music and Shakespeare's comedy be played together? It seems like a perfect marriage. But the music is not an interpretation of the play. It is the play; it is the heart and soul of the story Shakespeare wrote, in a form, perhaps, more coherent and organized than the scattered tale of the lovers in the wood. And when the music and comedy are played together, don't they duplicate each other?

This is a subversive thought that probably should not be uttered at a time like this. But it is offered as a partial explanation of the pedantry of the ballets. They seem to be embarrassed by the music they are danced to. Mr. Helpmann, as Oberon, is the best performer in the company, for he has a sense of mocking humor as well as great skill as a dancer. And Miss Shearer, as Titania, is gravely beautiful and exquisite in the dancing scenes. But the ballets seem like dutiful contributions to a monumental art enterprise and

they impede the flow of the story.

It is to be feared that the tone of this version of the "Dream" reverts to the English classical theatre of Beerbohm Tree and Henry Irving. Its imagination is sedate. The colors and designs are dignified. Everything is in the best taste of a departed era. Even the comedy is cultivated, as though Bottom, played by Stanley Holloway, were a college graduate taking part in an alumni frolic. The Pyramus and Thisbe thespians are not Shakespeare's rustic clowns but respectable business men on a frolic.

The Old Vic is respected here as the sort of theatre we wish we could have in New York. The Old Vic's visit to New York in 1946 is still remembered as one of the great events in modern theatre. American theatre-goers who visit London are always deeply impressed by the stage virtuosity and literary taste of the Old Vic productions.

But "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is below the standard. The grace of Shakespeare is lost in the Old Vic's magic woods.

Journal of the American

September 22, 1954

## Great Production Shakespeare Opus Still Disappointing

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE OLD VIC COMPANY, out of England, came to the Metropolitan Opera House last night with a beautifully mounted musical production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream"—words by Shakespeare, music by Mendelssohn, and performances by Moira Shearer, Robert Helpmann and Stanley Holloway—but they all failed to provide a very good time.

I have never thought much of "Dream" as a play; it is hopelessly confusing and catches The Bard at his cutest worst.

Even the best actor in a Jackasses head can only be

funny for a short time and we have long since ceased to roll in the pews when a large young man gets dressed up like a girl and talks in a falsetto screech.

There was some hope that the talents of the British visitors, or the ingenuity of the production, might overcome these deficiencies, but in my book they didn't.

### Full Competence

There was promise, for example, that the dancing of Miss Shearer and Mr. Helpmann would get it off the ground. But their big numbers seemed to me singularly lethargic, and even the corps de ballet lacked any particular determination; there was never the moment of excitement that might have been expected. Everybody seemed to be doing everything with complete competence—and no great imagination.

On the credit side of the ledger, however, was the fact that this is certainly a magnificent production, the costumes and scenery are brilliant. And you can't fail to be impressed by Mr. Mendelssohn's score, which happens to include the "Wedding March," rendered with taste and authority by Hugo Rignold and a large orchestra.

### 'Must' Performance

The fact seems to be, once again, that this is one of those specialized evenings: the words are all there, they are delivered by real professionals, and the auspices are immaculate. It is doubtful if we shall ever see this play given better production in our time, and a sincere devotee of the theatre should make it a must.

But I was disappointed. Miss Shearer is always decorative and she moves with the beauty of a feline; Mr. Helpmann is both a gifted actor and a renowned dancer; Stanley Holloway is one of Britain's foremost comedians. Perhaps we expected too much.

Could be that Mr. Shakespeare let us down.

## "A Midsummer Night's Dream"—continued

### New York Post

September 22, 1954

#### By Richard Watts Jr. The Old Vic's 'Midsummer Night'

London's celebrated Old Vic brought a large, handsome and lavish amalgamation of the theatrical arts to the Metropolitan Opera House last night. There was ballet, led by such eminent practitioners of the dance as Robert Helpmann and Moira Shearer. There was pageantry, brightened by colorful costumes and impressive settings. There was a lot of Mendelssohn music, including the not unknown "Wedding March." There were a number of notable British clowns, headed by Stanley Holloway, who is popular with American movie fans. There was even a touch of Shakespeare.

Since Shakespeare's contribution was "A Midsummer Night's Dream," there may be those who would not object to finding it relegated to a supporting role in the proceedings. After all, those fairly indistinguishable lovers, Lysander and Hermia, Demetrius and Helena, are not very exciting

people on the modern stage. Who, for example, can remember which is Lysander and which is Demetrius? And that comic interlude of "Pyramus and Thisbe," done by the Elizabethan tradesmen before the Duke of Athens, isn't the height of hilarity any longer.

#### Lyric World

Nevertheless, despite all its weaknesses for the audiences of today, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is still a play that possesses lovely and endearing virtues. For one thing, it creates a dream world that mixes mortals

and immortals, the gay and the lyric. In a universe of high imaginative fancy. Chiefly, though, it contains such lyric beauty in innumerable speeches that, had Shakespeare, heaven forbid, written nothing else, his place in poetry would be with the immortals. I can't help thinking the Old Vic visitors might have concentrated more upon him.

In some measure because the auditorium at the Metropolitan is so vast, but also because some of the actors seemed seized with inarticulateness, there were moments when I began to suspect that the play was being translated into Swahili. On other occasions, though, the speeches were so ably spoken and the result was so beautiful that I couldn't help wishing that Shakespeare, rather than the pageantry and the ballet, had been given the major part in the production. And let it be said on behalf of the clowns that they, too, were usually audible.

#### The Production

As sheer showmanlike production, the Old Vic presentation is unquestionably impressive. Although inclined to be stately and

a trifle heavy, it mixes ballet and music and pictorial values with a lavish hand, and the effect is frequently striking and beautiful. I suspect that this determination to make a colorful extravaganza out of an imaginative poetic comedy reveals a curious lack of confidence in Shakespeare, but, on its own terms, this "Midsummer Night's Dream" has a lot to offer. But there is nothing exactly sparkling about it.

Although she is not yet a distinguished Shakespearean actress, Miss Shearer brings both beauty and grace to the role of Titania, and, of course, she dances admirably. So does the talented Mr. Helpmann, whose Oberon is among the happiest features of the evening. Although no one can make Bottom hilarious, Mr. Holloway, an expert comedian, is excellent and I liked Elliot Makeham as Quince and Norman Rosington as Snout particularly well. Anthony Nicholls is a good Theseus, and Joan Benham succeeds in giving a humorous individuality to the much-jilted Helena. In general, I was a little disappointed.



New York World-Telegram  
and  
The Sun

September 22, 1954

## 'Dream' Takes Fans To a Fairy World

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The Old Vic's "Midsummer Night's Dream," which opened with full fanfare at the Metropolitan, is a real excursion into enchantment.

The play with its three interwoven stories from three different worlds, is properly a masque.

In this production, all the lovely Mendelssohn music is used. The evening is part elegant ball, part fantastic ballet, and part earthy comedy.



The fine melding of direction,

design and choreography gives it a satisfying cohesion.

All through the evening there are moments of such loveliness that shivers trace your spine. But none is more perfect than that when Titania and Oberon suddenly fly from their thrones off into space, as the curtain falls.

#### Music Is Familiar.

The mixed-up mortal romances are first set in a luxurious Athe-

nian palace. After the fanciful tour of the forest, the company returns to the palace for the final weddings. And there the immortal sprites grant their blessing.

It is always surprising to find how familiar this Mendelssohn music is, particularly so to hear the "Wedding March" as so bold a part of it. The long parade for the wedding scene is done with great spirit, speed and vigor. Its swirl of color brought a big hand from the premiere audience.

Of the cast, Moira Shearer possibly excites the most curiosity here for her picture following even more than for her work in ballet. She is startlingly lovely, with her red hair, crystal crowns and silver-spangled dresses. She dances exquisitely, but more important, moves like a real queen.

Opposite her as Oberon, Robert Helpmann is eerie, sinister and authoritative, all in gold-veined green, with the outlines of wings, and spike-like gold feathers. He casts an elegant spell.

#### Pleasant Surprise.

A warm and charming surprise to local audiences will be Stanley Holloway's appearance as the weaver, Bottom. Through Oberon's conniving, Bottom spends most of his time wearing a donkey's head, while Titania adores him and decks him with roses.

Mr. Holloway has great charm manipulating the very expressive donkey. And in the playlet he performs with restraint and strong comic effect.

As for the rest of a generally effective cast, I particularly liked the broad gaiety of Joan Benham's lugubrious Helena, and the mischievous fleetness of Philip Guard as Puck. Memorable, too, is the gawky Flute of Philip Locke.

The stage is always a pleasure to behold. The skies, the turbulent woods, even the lake, might be made of green lava. And when Miss Shearer appears to dance in white just faintly edged in violet, the delectable effect is beyond belief.